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BEAUTY FOR ASHES

BY

SISTER EMILIA, C.S.M.V.

Author of "The Sanctus Bell," "Workers Together with God,"
etc., etc.

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BY
SISTER EMILIA, C.S.M.V.

AUTHOR OF "THE SANCTUS BELL," "WORKERS
TOGETHER WITH GOD," ETC., ETC.

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ASHES

"TO WHAT PURPOSE IS THIS WASTE?"

THE ashes that remain when any substance has been reduced by fire may be either the worthless dregs that will not burn, or the purified residue that nothing can destroy, not even fire.

In the expression of Penitence, ashes convey a symbolism before God that the Holy Church was quick to appropriate from the earliest ages. We have lost the significance of outward emblems in this our day, because we have left off taking pleasure in subtle thought and profitable imaginations, to our great loss, and the poverty of modern religious inspiration. If we would but return to the devout habit of the Mother of us all, and ponder in our hearts the acts and words of the Son of God, daily repeated before our eyes, we should find a

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meaning in all that happens to us individually, in all our surroundings and circumstances, that would become strangely interesting, and would open our eyes to the spiritual senses of the world in which we live. Man has been highly endowed, and possesses faculties that are peculiarly his own; but civilization and the sordid contentment it produces in material property have resulted in the oblivion of his higher gifts, which he seldom uses, and hardly believes he owns.

Let us travel back to the primitive days when our Father Abraham led a meditative life in the desert, which is now peopled by our own kin, and has become intensely prominent in our history. His daily occupations allowed much leisure, and we are bound to confess it was profitably spent, since to all alike, Christian or Jew, the deep cogitations of the Patriarch Abraham have an eternal significance. We find him before God, in mysteriously intimate colloquy, and he gives a description of himself that is astonishing to the modern mind. *I am but dust and ashes*—is the lowly confession of the greatest thinker

of an age that embraces a period of at least a thousand years. This is a strange account for a man to render of himself; it does not sound natural to our ears, yet it descends to us from the earliest voice of the highest wisdom, from the one man in the world who at that time knew how to pray to God and win a favourable answer to his prayer.

Abraham is a very fascinating study; if any person now had no faith at all, and was determined to believe only in that which he discovered by his own investigation—as the manner is of some among us—he could not do better than start with Abraham, and set himself down in the desert to think out his position. In deep solitude, with an earnest desire to find the Truth, a man to-day would certainly have more than an equal chance with Abraham of achieving his purpose, and would be no less certain of revelation from God, if he would but be guided by the Father of the Faithful to discern that in himself he is but dust and ashes.

Dust thou art, and unto dust thou shalt return, is the Creator's verdict, and happy is

it for any man if he can plead there are also ashes in his composition, capable of being rekindled and kept alight by Divine Fire, when all the rest of his body is consumed by Divine Love. This is the consummation which man, made originally after the image of God, ought to desire exceedingly, sacrificing every atom of sensual temporality to win in the end an abiding spirituality. He is lost, and misses the object for which he exists upon earth, unless he willingly, with laborious industry, transfer the energies of mortal flesh to the undying habitations of his permanent Home.

A true penitent looks out with enlightened vision upon his fellow-creatures, and is grieved over their manifest insecurity. In his view, mankind elects to endure an Ash Wednesday the whole of his days on earth. *He heapeth up riches, and cannot tell who shall gather them.* Everything he accumulates perishes before his eyes, and the very fondness of his heart for earthly treasures decays and sifts away to fall on the cinder-heap of discarded joys that have burnt out and been rejected. As

it is with the toys of the child, so with the games of the boy, the sports of youth, and the passions of manhood, none of them survive to cheer the cold hearth of middle-age, or warm the pulse of the ancient, standing on the brink of the grave. The Wisdom of Solomon gives a vivid account of that which is always happening in our midst among those who reject the Gospel. Ashes are for ever on the heads of pleasure-seekers and lovers of the world; there is always grit between their teeth, and their eyes are blinded with the dust of past attractions. We may laugh to scorn the warnings of Scripture, and hold in derision John Bunyan and William Law, but universal experience is a book that every man must read, and explain it as he will, it is as Dead Sea fruit, full of ashes, if he has left Penitence out of its pages. Abraham knew it all and turned away wisely from his dust-heap, accumulated in the rash heat of a youth spent in that mysterious country where fire was an object of worship. He left it all, in obedience to the Call of God, and came into the wilderness to sift his ideas, and hoard up

imperishable substance that would kindle in the Divine glow. He discovered in deep soliloquy with God that in himself he was nothing, simply the dust from which man was made at the first; but he did not rest in that discovery, nor fear to remind his Maker of it, for he advanced to higher wisdom, and became convinced that in an earthen vessel he held, as it were cremated, the precious residue of a sacrificed life, that would ignite at the Divine touch, and glow brightly for ever before the Throne of God. As gold refined in the fire, more valuable because freed from dross, a life snatched from the flames of self-love and placed in the crucible of God, awaits but one further change, the consummation of being remade in the Image of its Maker and Redeemer.

It is all very well to say smart things about the "other-worldliness" of a Christian life, as if we were expected to do business with Almighty God upon terms of mutual advantage, giving Him things present in return for a future equivalent. The bargain would break down at the first temptation, if it were

made in the mercenary spirit the world pretends to detect in those who despise it. "One sin more, and then I will repent"—is ever the cry of the soul that is merely terrified into obedience; there is no salvation in such a creed. Those who suspect base motives to be at the root of religious profession are the non-thinkers, with shallow schemes of their own, flimsy devices to deceive if it were possible the very elect. Christ sets before His human brothers a doctrine transparently sincere in its painful and laborious demands. He offers us unreservedly a series of operations, without anæsthetics; we are to hang upon our cross as He did upon His own, and refuse relief as He did. It is the Truth laid bare He sets before His followers; we enter His service with our eyes open, well aware of His bitter wages. He will save us, yes, *so as by fire*. The "other-worldliness" does not count till after many a struggle to die easily, many an attempt to save one hand or one eye, to keep back part of the price and serve both God and Mammon.

Do not the citizens of the world detect with

scorn those who endeavour to make a footing in society by displaying their wealth, and boasting of their connections? It is not possible to adopt Christian graces just enough to be admitted to the heritage of the Saints, for they are stripped of selfish aspirations and are dissolved in Light, without a speck of double-mindedness. Their "other-worldliness" is the life-work of Love, costing all that they had.

There seem to be very many people in our day who have become extraordinarily scientific concerning their health, which is their absorbing study from morn till eve. They awake to consider the condition of every bodily function, and map out their day to suit the conditions of their animal organs; consulting certain indications, they regulate their time and food to keep an exactly balanced constitution, fit and wholesome. The morning meditation decides whether the human frame requires more or less fat, flesh, or fruit; whether exercise or repose shall be the order of the day, a little excitement, or absolute freedom from cares. The mind and heart are included in

the daily inspection, and their possessor will refuse visitors or court society according to the disposition of his nervous system. With such care and forethought the ravages of disease find no avenue of approach, and trouble is kept at a safe distance. Truly the children of this world are wiser than the children of light.

Strange is it that mankind is slow to perceive the Church of Christ is in fact the Laboratory of souls. Herein, with exact and well-distributed precision the health of the immortal spirit may be preserved in joyous salubrity by those who observe their Mother's rules. Her chemical experiments embrace the whole of the Christian Year, with a variety that is quite as congenial and salutary to the soul as to the body. After we have been through the course of instruction studiously for several years, we can become chemists ourselves, and apply the experiments of Holy Church to suit our individual needs. It is allowable to accept a Lenten penance when we have fallen into sin, even if this misfortune occur after Easter; and we are permitted to rejoice as

happy children over the Incarnation of the Son of God at any season, and every day, if we will. The wonders of Christ are so entrancing that a skilled professor will daily enjoy every miracle of His revelation, while outwardly observing that one which is prescribed.

The health of body, mind, and spirit is secured by those who make use of the Church as their medical adviser. We may awake and use our first conscious thoughts to recall our spiritual condition before God. Yesterday we were self-indulgent, slothful, irritable, the flesh is regaining ascendancy, the spirit is losing weight. To-day we must counteract the debauch by abstinence and self-control, and exercise at every opportunity kindness towards those we hurt and offended. Or we may reproach ourselves that we dreamed of some forbidden object, dangerously dear, and in consideration of this heart-disease, resolve to repose in the Love of God for several hours each day. It may be morbid thoughts that have tormented us upon our beds, or resentful, unforgiving feelings ; perhaps we have been

too engrossed in business calculations, or else coming dissipations have intruded upon our devotions. All such symptoms indicate that great care is needed, no excess can be permitted, wholesome medicines must be administered, to keep the living soul in touch with God, and the spirit united to Christ, the Saviour. Who can say that morning meditations such as these are less worthy and profitable than a diagnosis of our perishable bodies?

In the Laboratory of the Church there is a Master Mind, ever noticing the progress of His pupils, and marking who are really interested in His lessons. Many there are who attend Church as foolish schoolboys flock to lectures on chemistry, caring only when there is a fizz and a bang, or a display of bright colours. They come for beautiful music, eloquent sermons, or Occasional Offices, such as weddings. These will never become proficient in the school of Christ, for they take no interest in that which requires patient toil, and refuse to stand by and watch His wonderful compositions, or the slow fusing of solid metals in great heat, till that which is valuable is resolved. He

has, perhaps, only a very few advanced scholars in this Laboratory of the Church, but these few are worth more to Him than thousands of shallow gazers at the Catholic Faith, who only take in that which can be seen and heard. Proficient Christians alone can carry on the work of Christ in the world where He is no longer visible to the ordinary crowd. To them He is ever visible and audible, they act under His direct guidance, and patiently conduct His experiments, ignorant of their result, which may not appear during their life on this earth. We who are the backward pupils, yet perhaps longing to improve, may contemplate with awe their priceless ashes who lent themselves to be refined by the Master until they were entirely freed from earthly dross. Would that with such ashes as theirs upon our heads we could begin our Lent, and continue, as they did, true penitents until the final Easter transformation !

Let us honestly confess, as we submit ourselves to be dealt with by the Master as He will, that we have always been curiously doubtful about the absolute truth of the

saying that *Flesh and blood cannot inherit the Kingdom of God*. We have felt so cheerfully confident that our natural state is permanent, that we have never really inquired whether there be any Holy Spirit, the Lord and Giver of Life. Our Baptism was as entirely forgotten as the day of our birth into the world ; it was doubtless explained, but made no impression on our minds of any consequence, and imposed no obligations. The birthday of every child is a great feast, but the Christening Day is seldom observed or even remembered. To live and grow and enjoy life has been the sole duty of most of us in the days of youth. But now there are many things to remind us that death will not be long in coming, and death means *dust to dust*. The children that we loved and played with are lying in unknown graves, there is nothing left of all their joyous laughter, their health and beauty, and their splendid courage ; their glory and our boast is in their ashes. In a short time they fulfilled a long time, and have shown us what to do in the long years that may remain to us here ; we have to die to self as our heroes have done,

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and fight our way to conquest over sin by sacrifice. This is what Holy Baptism means for every Christian, and we are well armed for the fight, and defended by a very strong Rock.

But see : there is a noble army trooping back to England, pale and maimed, crippled, blinded, wrecked for life, disfigured so that they cannot be recognized for the strong and handsome soldiers that went forth to risk their all. Pity is not tender enough to express our sorrow at seeing this great ruin in our midst ; no heart can dwell upon it and not break. They have left behind their energetic limbs, those bright, merry eyes have been scorched in deadly flames, the comely countenances bear hideous scars, the brain is clouded of our best and brightest. They can never be as they were before the war.

What does it mean to us who stay at home ? We have been baptized, and at the King's command have met the foe ; but it was not all victory, nor have we kept our Chrisom Robe unstained. The world, the flesh, and the devil have torn soldiers of Christ, and hardly one escapes without a wound. Those

who laid down their lives and were accepted seem almost more enviable than those who return, with bitter anguish, to begin their life again, under marred conditions. We are among the multitude who suffered from the enemy, for hardly one escapes. The darts of the evil one find out our weak spots, we become entangled in his meshes, and burn in his liquid fire ; his poison lurks in our veins and keeps us for ever diseased ; his torments and cruel devices have been felt by us all. If it were not for our past sins and continual temptations, there would be for us no welcome home in honourable triumph, no rejoicing among men and angels over the sinners restored and forgiven.

For there is in the Hospital of the Church a way of restoration for all our sins and infirmities, and if our spiritual eyes were opened we should see with wonder and thanksgiving the bandages applied to open wounds of sin that have been laid bare and healed by contrition, and the devices that our Lord has invented to supply the loss of hands cut off and eyes plucked out in His service. No one need

lose hope who creeps back home to be healed. The Good Physician loves His work and never spares Himself. He is in His glory when we own that without Him we must die. The deep abasement of a noble soul, labouring under strong temptation, who has perhaps yielded more than once, and been taken prisoner, and escaped,—this is the glorious opportunity of the Captain of our Salvation. He alone can heal and restore; no cures of modern science are equal in skill to the restoration of spiritual forces wasted by the ravages of vice. There are men in the hospitals, hundreds of them, who have suffered the amputation of more than one limb with submission, even with gratitude, yet shrink when the sore spot is touched in their souls, and dread the day of their first confession more than the worst operation. This alone proves the wonder of forgiven sin, and the horror of shame that troubles a guilty heart afraid to tell all to Jesus and hear His verdict. The limb is lost and returns to dust, and the man scarcely murmurs, so thankful is he to live even a mutilated life. The contrite soul may

in like manner renounce the sin that mortifies and obstructs the approach to God, and joyfully live without it in the light of His Presence.

Pitiful indeed it is to watch the once independent man groping his way, or led by the hand like a child ; the numbers of hopelessly blinded soldiers distress us beyond words. There are the spiritually blind, who have never seen, and wilfully remain ignorant ; and there are those who once seeing, wandered out of the way, and now, having given their eyes in the King's cause, are obedient to a touch, and walk in His narrow paths in safety.

Happy is it for all who know their own weakness, and live no longer self-satisfied lives, according to their own will. We need deep lessons, there must be pain and suffering in every warrior's life, but it leaves an ash behind it that glows in brighter radiance than the untried ranks can show who never went forth to war.

What will happen to our wounded soldiers ? Who will support them, and help them bear the burden of their shattered lives ? Their king and country want them now, more than

ever before; they are the honour and the pride of each nation glad to possess them. They will be fed and provided for, and be the first consideration among us for all the years of peace that are to come. We can look forward to the banquets that will be held in honour of the great victories in which so many fell, and picture how the veterans will assemble year after year, noting the latest gaps in their numbers, until honourable mention is made of the last man living who fought at Mons, at Verdun, at Antwerp, at Riga. So shall they all melt away to join the hosts who fell upon the field of battle.

In the same manner does our King and Commander, the Lord Jesus Christ, summon to His Banquet those who have fought for Him, and depend upon His bounty. He does not neglect His faithful servants, and leave them without sustenance when they give up all for His sake. There is the Lord's own service, where they are bound to present themselves, as at a grand parade, to receive the pledge of His protection, and the badge of His reward. . . What we do receive in the

Blessed Sacrament is the everlasting Residue
He won for us by His Passion, even Himself,
distributed to all His own, by the which He
stamps His Likeness on our spiritualized
nature, and gives us power to reign with Him
for ever.

LENT AND EASTER

*"SOWN A NATURAL BODY; RAISED A
SPIRITUAL BODY"*

THE first snowdrop appeared above the sod or ever the Feast of the Epiphany brought wise men from the East. She gave one upward glance, and then hung down her meek head silently, a lonely blossom in a chill and inhospitable garden.

Children of men, we were all of us born like that frail snowdrop, into a bleak and solitary world, the first of our kind, each of us beginning a new year; for we cannot touch the years that are past nor the lives that are all around us; you will be always separated from me, and I shall be distinct from every other created thing that is. For me, as for the snowdrop, existence depends upon air and light and a nourishing soil, not at all upon the companionship of others, or the beauty

of our environment. With a brave heart, let us face the dread fact from which human nature shrinks in dismay, that we are each of us one apart, an individual incomplete in itself, and yet severely isolated, unable to appropriate that which is another's, doomed to be always a snowdrop and nothing else, or some creature that Nature has produced in carrying out her law of succession.

It is to man that this cruel, inexorable law causes the deep pain that is in every suffering heart. *It is not good for man to be alone*—and yet alone he is, from first to last, and never has a second self to share his inward burden. We have read German novels, one after the other, till we ceased from nausea, even in the days of early youth, for each repeated the same weird history of a soul resisting fiercely its natural solitude, and unable to find a way out of it save in the sympathy of sinning, or the blank climax of a suicide's end. And we may be living side by side with a multitude of separated identities, proudly grieving in secret over the coldness of a fate that places them alone in a frozen .

world, like the snowdrop in her pearly purity that has risen prematurely from her winter couch. It is a pain that few confess, even to the secret conscience that communes with its own heart to relieve the tension of solitary imprisonment that would otherwise madden the active spirit that is in a man. If we were not so terribly alone, life would be not only endurable, but ecstatic, so boundless are the energies of a living soul when once they are set free ; but vainly they throb for a vent, and are powerless to act apart ; there are ever, in the solitary spirit, wide fields unexplored, vast resources cooped up and unused, waiting, waiting for a Mate. Yes, that is the inevitable conclusion of the whole matter in the eyes of the world which see no further than the satisfaction of human nature's temporal yearnings, and would terminate all history at the rapturous visit of a bee to the solitary flower. The world is never true to Nature when it tries to discover the secret of happiness, for the lying spirit that is in the world stops short where it ought to begin, and is as superficial as the flicker of a January sunbeam. The

blossom that is kissed by the bee may become fruitful or bear seed, so that Nature can carry on her law of reproduction, but hidden away under the ground is the true result of a brave, solitary life, and the bulb that shrivels and dies while the flower pushes its way upward is the symbol of that hidden growth that endures and develops long after the seed has been scattered or the drooping flower gathered to perish.

We ought to take more time to think about it than we do, for it is a very remarkable phase of our being which we have been considering, common to every kingdom in Nature and richly productive in the things that concern eternal life. Nobody ever found it out until Christ came to explain it as one of the most profound mysteries of His Heavenly Father, hidden from the wise and prudent, to be revealed unto babes.

Except a corn of wheat die, it abideth alone, but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit. So saith the Master, and the world smiles at His simplicity, for who is there that does not know this fact? The world may know it in the vulgar tongue, but cannot translate it

into spiritual language as those can who have been taught of God to prove the doctrine whether it be true. The sweetness of experiencing the outcome of relying upon the mysterious wisdom of the Son of God, more than compensates for the severity of those experiments which He invites us to attempt in faith ; and the length of time taken out of a short human life to work out one of His obscure problems is verily but as a moment when compared to the everlasting treasure won by obedience to His methods.

Mortal, consider what He says, for it is more worth while than any earthly consideration.

We stand, as solitary flowers in a wide, wintry world, and He would have us cease to complain of the rough winds and the adverse situation, cease to be anxious about flourishing here, or propagating our kind, cease to grieve when a cruel hand breaks short the stem, and renders us no longer visible upon earth ; and give all our attention to the hidden growth in heart and spirit, naked and open in the eyes of Him with Whom we have to do. This, He says, is of vital importance, and the only thing

that matters, for this only may survive, when all else shall have perished.

We have heard this thing before, reason convinces us it is true, but when the opportunity occurs to put it into practice, Nature rebels, and we listen to her voice that seems so much nearer and clearer than the Voice of Love Divine ; we listen, and protect the flower, sheltering and fostering it, as in some elegant boudoir, while the root is left to perish and decay, in cold neglect, as worthless.

Every day and in every place can be noticed this fatal mistake, for the present satisfaction is dearer than a solid accumulation of virtuous habits that might be our eternal heritage, and the outward show that wins momentary esteem is cheaper than the deep inward growth in holiness that alone is acceptable in God's sight. This is the reason why Christianity has become poor and powerless, as salt that has lost its savour, or as a root in shallow soil that has no vigour and cannot multiply ; the flowers rot off, and do not attain perfection, and the followers of Christ seem to have forgotten the depth and reality of His original Gospel.

Christianity without a Lent is a flower with an uncultivated root, an empty show, and valueless. The Lent of forty days set apart by Holy Church is but a reminder to the Christian that his whole life must be a Lent of prayer and watchfulness if he would attain to Easter joy. Many wise souls voluntarily observe a life-long penance, convinced that to suffer with Christ is hereafter to reign with Him. Others, naturally self-indulgent, who would never exercise self-control out of obedience to any law, have been saved from wanton destruction by the merciful chastisement of God, severely restraining them against their will, until at last they can see from what they have been preserved, and bless the rod that smote them. In such as these the discipline that the season of Lent is intended to begin, continues through life, and is fruitful in this world in strong and free characters, full of blessing wherever they may be placed.

But because of our weakness, and to encourage us bravely to take up the Cross and follow Christ in reality, we have six weeks in every year in which we are advised to sink

into the ground and die like the corn of wheat. Every plant that is needs its winter and cannot develop without it; we are not perishing annuals, but hardy perennials, and must take time to grow and spread below ground. If we die with Him, willingly and gladly, we shall also live with Him, when our Easter-call is heard. The necessary dying is not so dreary as it appears, the growing plants enjoy their winter rest; and in the sight of the unwise we seem to die, but we are in peace, while we lie quietly in the shade and cultivate Christian graces. Indeed no soul can know satisfaction that has not put forth its full power and tried to lead the highest life, which ever is the deepest, seen only by the eyes of Him with Whom we have to do. Immediately, upon embracing with every faculty the high doctrine of Christ, a soul becomes conscious of companionship and sympathy that obliterates the old, dark, solitary misery and gives her a zest and interest in this life and the next, proving she is now achieving the end for which she was created.

Lent has become an uncongenial season of

late years to many honest souls who feel an aversion to the trivial suggestions usually brought forward, about small restrictions in diet, the dusting of crucifixes, and the like, involving no real self-denial, and only adding to the unreality of modern religion. To most of us it is sufficient to observe no other law than that of health, by which serenity of mind is secured, and the placid satisfaction resulting from strong nerves. The very thought of enduring hardness is repulsive and unnatural to those who only desire to make a fair show in the flesh and live in it long and prosperously. This is the delusion of our generation that the great tribulation has exposed and shattered.

The gracefulness and perfection of a flower depend upon the firm support of the stem, which is nourished and strengthened by the root beneath the sod. Our outer life is the flower, the expression before the world of our genus and species, but the channel is too often neglected which would keep up a supply of wholesome virtues, and make us shine to the glory of God. The intellect, the nerves, and the feelings depend entirely upon hidden

sources, and these are too often starved or blocked, while the flower languishes and the life becomes contemptible. We should tremble to calculate the waste of intellectual power in our own past history, it would add up to bitter shame ; the foolishness of clever thoughts and wild imaginations verging upon every mortal sin that but for lack of courage would be carried into action ; the hours and even days spent in reading novels simply because of idleness and dislike of useful occupations ; the vague and vacant dreamings when constrained to attend church, or to kneel with a semblance of devotion. Surely a Lenten season spent in bringing the intellect into rational service would make the flower of life more worthy of its position.

And the nervous system, which is meant to warn us of danger, and keep us alive to the needs of our own nature and that of others, and sensitive to the impression we produce, has become in our day the excuse for indulgence in irritation, and a restless desire for change. Mankind is not really the helpless victim to his quivering nerves and those who

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get on them ; the happiness of their owners and of all their relations would be secured if these inconvenient appendages were laid low like evil ghosts, and that great blessing could be attained by an earnest Lent spent in exercising genuine self-control, far more enduringly than by sojourning in expensive Nursing Homes.

Again, the human heart is responsible for its feelings ; they do not arise haphazard to torment the highly-strung and beautifully organized being that is lord over every other created animal. People talk as if they were completely at the mercy of an inner tyrant, driving them hither and thither at will, while they have no power to resist their perverse affections. A serious period of deep inner research will convince them that the evil of their hearts and the miseries they suffer from their emotions, result from shallow roots unwatered by the Holy Spirit of God.

A Lent that is root-deep and stirs the very foundations must have magnificent results. It concerns every one, in whatever estate, believing in the Catholic Faith, or without Faith, and only very miserable ; for it is

necessary to the soul's salvation to take one's self in hand at least once in the year, and open the obstructed passages between self and God. It is sufficient for Him to hear from His child's own lips the acknowledgment that he is sad, disappointed about his life, ashamed of past failure, and He will point to His Beloved Son Who is always crying, *Come unto Me*.

It is an ordinary experience to arrive at years of maturity and discover suddenly how very ordinary one is, how unfinished and in everything but age immature. Many are confronted with the image of that which they really are in themselves, and see no remedy but to bear it. All through life they are condemned to be just this very commonplace, tempersome, dissatisfied mortal that has been revealed to them in a flash. Ah, what a calamity to have such an individuality tacked on to a spirit that admires above all things that which is perfect and high and beautiful, outside itself, and realizes there is nothing of the sort within! Men blame their inheritance, their environment, their education, for producing such an uninteresting personality

as their own, and sadly adopt themselves as life-long companions, because they cannot exchange with others more fortunate.

Foolish, insignificant daisies are we all, born weeds, every one of us, full of ideas that multiply and run all over the lawn, to be cut off ruthlessly by time's stern hand, until the shallow plant is itself rooted up.

Now, if we do feel impatient with ourselves, and really desire to be other than we are, is this impossible? Children of God, are you not only silly, but blind and deaf? Listen to the simple precepts of Mother Nature, and be comforted. See the cultivated daisy, placed in rich garden mould, the ornament of the spring garden. Once it was a common little weed like yourself, but it has responded to the Master's care and is now a new creature. So may we all be changed, and become like the Highest of all human beings, if we seek out and accept the only true philosophy there is, and begin the work that shall transform us into the likeness of Christ.

It is an old custom of the Faithful to repeat after each Communion the first chapter of

Saint John's Gospel to the end of the fourteenth verse. These are the most weighty and important words we possess, and contain in a nutshell the deep Truth that we have laboured to explain in simple language. Here is revealed to us in a flash that our natural birth is not irremediable; we can begin afresh and be remade or regenerate, all the faults of heredity or character can be removed, we have the chance of becoming sound and flawless, and we have the offer of an honourable parentage, a new name, great power and influence, if we cultivate our souls and acquire implicit faith, if we put on Christ and are made like unto Him in Truth and Grace.

In order to understand how it is He alone can help us to rise out of our natural degradation, we must remember that a double-daisy can revert to its wild state, and become a simple weed once more. This the Son of God actually did for our sake, and to raise up us to be as He is. He made Himself of no reputation, took human flesh, and in a manner we naturally despise, accepted the lowliest birth under the poorest conditions, and lived

obscurely, in continual humiliation, undergoing the very cultivation of obedience unto death that He prescribes for all His brethren if they would at last be raised to newness of life. Christ was rooted and grounded in the Love of God, He fed upon the Air and Sunlight of His Father's Presence, His Life was a secret operation resulting in the culminating miracle of His Power, when He arose after bodily death, a Superior and Glorious Human Being, the First of many brethren.

There cannot be an ambition worthier of the heart of man than to overcome natural infirmities and be free from every care and every sin, even while yet in the body. This can be done, it has been done by many who are living still in the world ; we are intended to do it, and for this cause were we born.

A simple wild daisy is undoubtedly very beautiful, and God loves it, for *never would He have made anything if He had not loved it.* Perhaps we admire it more than the large, double red daisy, produced by the gardener's art. In the same way there is a special charm in childhood, and even in the natural wild

man ; we would not too early begin to cultivate our children in the world's code of perfection. But who is there that has not suffered from the superfluity of weeds in the garden, and in the human heart that refuses to be trained or checked ? Everywhere perverse women insist upon irresponsible incursions beyond their province, and obstinately maintain their right to behave as foolish children, running riot in the house. Not women only, but men, refuse to out-grow the self-indulgence and passionate impulses of spoilt children, and waste their lives upon trifles even till grey hairs surprise them in their folly. No one can check us, or make us wise against our will ; we must take ourselves in hand, and in doing this find out it is impossible to be worth anything at all without the Grace of God. It is a very serious consideration for each one of us that there is only one *I* in all the world ; if *I* am lost, all is lost as far as *I* am concerned.

There are strange thoughts abroad, weird suggestions, novel ideas of what men and women could do, and ought to be doing. None

of these are so wonderful as the possible achievements of those who live in Christ and abide in Him closely. Nothing is impossible with Him. Double flowers, for example, have no sex, and in Christ Jesus there is neither male nor female. No one is so safe from sensual weakness as the true Christian who loves Christ first and only ; no one is so trusted with responsibility ; none else can do the mighty works of God.

The transformation may be very slow, and require years of patience, a life-long Lent, but it is not we who do the pruning and the digging, or choose the favourable situation where we are to grow and develop ; we have only to lie still and accept the kindly discipline, being very careful not to do anything before the time ; we must be content to waste away in the shade, and not put forth useless leaves that weaken the buried root. It is a very great thing for which we were made ; let us allow God to accomplish His will in us, and be sure that at last it will be to His Glory. Think of the astonishment in store for us when at last we are able to see what He has

been doing in us, ever since the happy day when we really resolved to be led by the Spirit of God, and never, never turn back ! We shall hardly be able to believe it when the change becomes a blessed certainty, and Christ truly has possession of our whole being, He in us and we in Him. No resistance will be left, no discontent, no self-will ; inclinations to temper, sloth, sensuality will be as far away as if they had never been ; everything disagreeable and contradictory will have vanished ; there will be no one we dislike, and no one we fear. Greatest marvel of all. Prayer will be sweeter to us than meat and drink, and even more necessary ; to be alone with God will be our greatest happiness, and to draw others nearer to Him, our one anxiety. The words of the Holy Bible will be verified by long experience, and so linked in with our own career they will seem as if written for us alone.

And if we travel along the King's Highway, and do not strike out fanciful bypaths for ourselves, there will be in the light at eventide strong rays illuminating the golden Chalice filled with the Precious Blood whereby our

strength has been sustained, while our life was gradually absorbed in His own. What the Blessed Sacrament can be, let the victorious saints relate, who put it foremost among the trophies our Leader bequeathed to His Church to strengthen her in the great tribulation. Outside, there is great haste to complete the work of salvation in a few moments of heated emotion. What the patience of the saints is, let the Church declare, for she has long records of brave struggles, with many failures, conversions, and relapses with new beginnings, and desperate attempts, all in the reliance upon the channels of Grace that are as the very stem of a flower, conveying nourishment and life. Nothing that is great and lasting can be wrought in haste. Those who expect an impulse of conviction to secure freedom from sin for ever are bitterly perplexed when temptation resumes its force, and old habits drag back the soul into thralldom, while all the freshness of religious fervour dies away, and they revert to the wild state of natural error and never come to perfection.

Christ has prepared for us a narrow pathway with many steps and stations, shrines, and resting-places. His Way of holiness leadeth unto everlasting life, and there are no turnings in it, only sign-posts urging the weary pilgrim to follow on. If His Sacraments appear to strangers but cold and uninviting forms, it is because they have never tried their power, or because they prefer to remain in the state of nature and dread the renewal of the life of Grace.

There are those who have always been blest with the Sacraments of the Church, and yet despise them, finding no efficacy in their use; they have been taught and trained from early youth, and know the Faith as perfectly as they know any foreign language taught at school by grammar only. Yet this does not make them feel at home in the Heavenly Country, any more than in France, where they cannot speak fluently. Communion with God is acquired in exactly the same way as communion with those who speak in an unknown tongue—by conversation, intercourse, reading, and lively interest, in a word, by cultivation.

Nothing that we have is of any real value to us until we use it ; not money, or speech, time, health, or religion. Only when the heir begins to spend does he realize the benefit of being rich, and in the same way it is a revelation to every astonished soul when religion is appropriated and becomes current coin. When we know what it means to have a Lent of our own, and an Easter of our own, we have found at last a JESUS of our own—*My* Lord, and *my* God !

There are but a few years allowed even to the most fortunate of mankind, in which the world is a happy abode, full of pleasures and keen interests. Those who are the most indulged in youth are the first to complain of the weariness of earth and all its pursuits, and it is rare to meet a face that is not care-worn after thirty. Here we are, and here we must remain, with this hideous loneliness gnawing at our hearts, and deep capacities for enjoyment that may never be exercised. And the world has so cruelly misunderstood the Life and Doctrine of our Blessed Lord Jesus Christ, that it says to His Face, “He

is no use, He has been tried and failed." This is the lie that has worked ruin in our midst and brought upon the world the greatest scourge that ever has been felt. It is a brazen and cowardly accusation to deny the power of the Son of God to destroy the works of the devil, when we have never wanted them to be destroyed till now. It has seemed so easy to outwit death by new rules of health, to overcome care by dissipation and travel, to pretend that the only object in life is to enjoy it, that no one has attempted to put to the test all the great promises of Christ. The few who have outwardly accepted Him as with one hand, tamper with the snares of the world, the flesh, and the devil with the other, and then decide that spiritualism or science are more to their taste than the strictness of Christianity. Ah, we have been a deluded generation, and have cast away the nobility of our immortal souls !

In renouncing the soundness of plain doctrine to substitute fancies and ideas originating in the abuse of liberty, we have gained nothing to compensate for the sweetness of obedience

to Divine Law. No one is less melancholy in middle life and less weary in old age because he no longer prays, nor reads his Bible, nor loves the Church. He may scoff at these primitive duties as childish and outworn, but has he anything better to replace them? Is a good digestion really more important than a good conscience? And when an aged sire of eighty prides himself upon taking a daily ride, or playing golf, is he really an enviable being if that is all his boast?

The wise prepare beforehand a rich harvest for the long, dark, lonely years when they will have no place in the world among the young and active, and yet have a secret enjoyment of life that is a possession shared with God; everything else is poor and perishing, but in Christ they are ever young children, waiting for the door to open and admit them into everlasting joy.

The revelation of God goes to the very root of our disease and overturns all guesses and hallucinations. It is not far away from us, but the Mystery that has been revealed, explaining all things. Nature held the secret

shut up in her warm breast from the beginning of creation, but the enemy of man blinded his eyes and deafened his ears, leaving him to grope on the face of the earth in drear bewilderment. Then the Author of Nature appeared to unlock the secret of our being, and in His Light all things are made clear and lovely and fall into their right place. He shows us how Nature is working for her living, and carries on her existence by sacrificing the present to the future. Nature provided for mankind when he was not, by storing up sunshine in buried forests to warm him and cook for him after thousands of years; by crushing with huge layers of granite the transitory life out of millions of tiny animals, to be stored up in oil-mines for the age when the uses of electricity should be discovered; and in hundreds of other ways man reaps daily the fruits of ancient sacrifice. It is the Law of God, and He Himself is obedient to His own Law, sending forth His own Energy and Reason in the Person of His Son to work as the Father worked hitherto, that man might profit by His labours. Are we to be

among the stupid savages in the world, who know not the use of coal or petrol, and continue to live without modern conveniences ?

In Christ we have the revelation of how to live in the highest sense, that we may live for ever. He employs us, when we accept Him, and occupation is half the battle towards happiness ; we are taught by Him to be continually storing up Treasure for an endless eternity, when all we sacrifice here will be multiplied exceedingly. The very act of laying up our Treasure is a joy none else can know, there is no other satisfaction to be compared to it. And the result will be magnificent, even in the estimation of the world, which will not endure the Cross, and shuns all that involves self-denial. Even the world cries out in admiration when the Easter Lord is Risen, knowing and caring little for what His Triumph cost Him. That victory must and shall be ours if we suffer while our life is hid with Christ in God, for to suffer is to reign.



